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ADDRESS

FROM THE

COMMITTEE OF SYNOD

TO THE

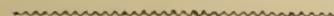
OFFICE-BEARERS AND MEMBERS

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CANADA,

ON THE SUBJECT OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE

WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.



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ADDRESS

*From the Committee of Synod to the Office-bearers and Members
of the Presbyterian Church of Canada on the subject of the
commemoration of the Westminster Assembly.*

DEAR FRIENDS AND BRETHREN IN CHRIST JESUS,
OUR ONLY LORD AND REDEEMER;

FOR many obvious reasons, it is deemed peculiarly necessary and appropriate, at the present time, to remind one another of the essential truths of the Word of God ; and that His will, as contained therein, is the only standard to which we ought with absolute submission to bow. The whole world lieth in wickedness—under the power of the wicked one : the Almighty, who has mysteriously permitted this usurpation, for purposes which in the coming Eternity He will unfold, has declared it to be His design to recover the world from the dominion of Satan : and that this His design shall be effected by a method the most astonishing—the coming into the world of the Eternal Son of God—His remaining in it for a season, teaching a certain portion of its inhabitants the only way in which the Eternal Father must be worshipped—His appointing those who believed what He thus taught, to communicate the Knowledge of it to all the world—His dying to free believers from the punishment and the power of sin—His rising out of the grave ; and, after a short residence among His disciples, His ascending to the throne of Heaven, wearing still that nature which, that the world might be recovered to its allegiance to the Father, He had, in wondrous condescension, submitted to assume—His sending from Heaven the Eternal and everywhere present Spirit, to convert, confirm, sanctify, and perfect all who should believe the truth concerning Himself. This is Jehovah's revealed method of winning back from Satan, the love and the loyalty of man. Nothing does Satan so much dread than that man should know this method, and become a fellow worker with God in acting upon it. Hence the conflict which is witnessed on earth, and the combatants are, by the Captain of salvation, arranged on one or other of but two sides—His—or Satan's. Every man born into the world is called upon to choose his side : and as the call of Christ or of Satan is responded to, every man is found to act, in advancing Christ's cause, or retarding it. Because Christ has, by the sacrifice of Himself, redeemed the world, all power in Heaven and earth has been committed unto Him, in order that no power which Satan may succeed in raising should

be able to hinder the accomplishment of the destined object of the Redeemer, Governor and Judge—even the collecting together within the mansions of His Father's house, “a number which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” The issue of this conflict is not doubtful. What are the thousands of years, in the history of this world, which are already past, or what is the period of its history which is yet to come, during which Satan's usurped and permitted supremacy has extended, or may still extend—what is all this, compared with Eternity? Satan has put forth his power, and is still doing so, “because he knoweth that his time is *short*.” “As the Lord liveth,” it will ere long be proved that the Lord of hosts shall also *reign*—“that all nations shall be blessed in Him, and shall call Him blessed.” In effecting the recovery of the world to God, He who is appointed Head of all things, makes use of the various elements found in the constitution of man, and which are embodied and exemplified in the various institutions which man, under Divine authority, has formed.

Because of the tendency which still exists within us to forget the Divine rule of procedure and judgment, and the temptations without which constantly urge us to despise it, we shall find it to be the part of wisdom and safety very frequently to examine whether there be any thing in our sentiments or conduct, which we cannot, as before the Lord, our Maker and Judge, declare to be in accordance with that Test by which He, at the last day will try us.

This examination ought to be made by every *individual* apart; for every one of us shall give account of himself to God—the call to every individual apart being,—believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved. Every one who embraces Christ, thus offered freely in the Gospel, feels and acknowledges that he is in possession of that liberty wherewith Christ maketh His people free. Yet this is not the liberty which is often on the lips of those who, though their bodies be free, are constantly affording such awful proof that their souls are under a slavery the most degrading, and all the more fatal because our spiritual enemies have succeeded in deluding them with the imagination that permission and ability to do that to which their hearts prompt them form the only liberty which in this short life is valuable. The freeman, whose soul the Divine Spirit by the truth concerning Jesus has made free, knows and acknowledges that he is not without law, but is under the law of Christ: and although he has a right, which no man, and no community of men, may lawfully take from him, to exercise his reason on every matter whatever that may be brought under his consideration, yet he ought ever to be careful that his conscience be informed and enlightened by all the aids which his Heavenly Master has afforded

him, before his judgment, as the result of this process, be either formed or expressed—and when, after not a hasty, prejudiced or partial, but a patient, scholar-like consideration of that word which God has magnified above all the other ways of finding out His will, and after comparing one part of it with another, with humble and believing prayer for the Spirit's guidance, the proof of a deep conviction of his proneness to err, he discovers the path concerning which he has the authority and the assurance, “thus saith the Lord—this is the way, walk in it”—such an individual exemplifies to all, how true are the sayings that are written—blessed is the man whose strength is in the Lord—the path of the just is as the shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. He is himself blessed, and is made a blessing to others. It is in this way, and this way only, that it is the intention of the Lord that every man should govern himself, not according to his own will, but according to the will of God—the Head, as Supreme Governor of every man, being Christ. Thus let every one often and seriously sit in judgment upon his views and deportment, with constant reference to the Divine word, as the only infallible Test and Rule. This will result in every man's welfare; and who so much interested in a man's welfare, as himself?

Such strict and sifting examination ought also to be made by every *family* apart. The Divine Creator has implanted certain principles within every individual, which lead necessarily and by Divine authority, to the formation of families. The incorporation of individuals into families is an ordinance of God. And, for the management of families, He has revealed a system of laws; the heads of families being the administrators of these laws, under responsibility to Christ, for the faithful performance of their important trust. He who maketh families like a flock, will honour and prosper those families who, at the call of parents and masters, honour Him; and He will also pour His fury upon the families that call not on His name. Let every family apart then, under its Divinely appointed Rulers, parents and masters, be frequently and with due solemnity searched, by means of the written word, that betimes, children and servants may be taught to know and to walk in the good way of the Lord—to prevent this most important Divine institution from being turned into an association, with its every member under the snare of the Devil, led captive by him at his will. An account of this, the Lord will soon require at parents' hands.

Such examination ought also to be instituted by every Nation apart. The union of many families into a Nation is also by Divine appointment. The Supreme lawgiver has declared it to be His will that communities or nations should be under certain regulations, the general

principles for the formation of which are distinctly unfolded in the Bible. Provided nations, as such, in the appointment of their Rulers, by whatever name such Rulers may be called, have respect to the Bible truth that Christ is the Governor among the nations—the Prince of the Kings of the earth; and that the nation and Kingdom that will not serve Him shall perish: and provided the Rulers know and act upon the knowledge of this other Bible truth, that they are the Ministers of God to the people for good—the prosperity and peace of nations would be secured—since on all national glory would be inscribed, “holiness to the Lord.” The records of history tell us of the utter wasting and destruction of the various nations that have established themselves in the world: mere philosophers have speculated on the causes of this, and in glowing language have lamented premature national decay: but the Bible alone acquaints us with the true secret of a nation’s prosperity and success; and any nation may possess this secret, and enjoy its benefits. Here is the Divine charter of a nation’s happiness—“Thus saith the Lord, if ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments and do them, I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.” And here too is unfolded the true cause of a nation’s destruction—“if they will not obey, I will utterly pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the Lord.” We find then that in the Bible, He who is the Governor among the nations, has promulgated His laws for the government of nations; and that the Rulers of nations are amenable to Him for the conformity or want of it which may be found between the revelations of the Divine will and those enactments which may be made, under their authority, for the orderly management of the affairs of the community which they are appointed to rule. And thus, the stability and permanent safety of a nation depend upon the accordance which subsists between the recorded will of the Divine Lawgiver, and the avowed and recorded sentiments of its Rulers in its acts of legislation. And hence the reason why a nation, professing to know and to keep the truth, should often be called upon, by its Rulers, throughout the various departments and families composing it, to examine, not by comparison with surrounding nations, especially such as may have made no such national profession, but by a deliberate and solemn appeal to the Bible, whether, in its national capacity, it be receding from the path of that Divine Rule, or advancing in it.

In proportion as such an examination is instituted by individuals, families and nations, dwelling on the face of the whole earth, will that glorious consummation be accelerated which shall call forth the unbounded “praise of great voices in Heaven, saying, the Kingdoms of this world are become the Kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and He shall reign for ever.”

The Divine Ruler has intimated it as the special purpose which He wills should be accomplished by means of His commanded establishment of families and nations—that there should be the establishment of another community, formed out of, and subsisting in the midst of the various families and nations of the world, to whom He communicates the knowledge of His will. All the individuals composing families; parents and children, masters and servants—and all the individuals forming a nation, Sovereigns and subjects, the rulers and the ruled, of every grade, are invited and commanded by God to constitute component parts of this community, under the solemn, humbling, and affecting consideration, by each, of the Divine intimation and promise—“there is no respect of persons with God—the rich and the poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all—where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

When spoken of or alluded to, as individuals, the persons forming this society are called “believers, disciples or scholars, followers of Christ, christians, faithful ones, saints or holy ones, brethren, soldiers of Jesus Christ, people of God.”

The community or society composed of persons so designated, is, in the Bible, most frequently denominated the Church of God, or the Church of Christ—the English word *Church*, however, not setting forth to the mind of a person unacquainted with the Greek language, the meaning of the Greek word, of which the word *Church* is the translation in the English Bible—the Greek word signifying a community or assembly of persons, called, chosen, or selected from amongst others—the means by which the Divine Spirit has thus called them being the truth concerning Christ contained in the word ; and to whose call, by this means, they have responded, and are together before God, to hear from His word, as their only Rule, all things which are therein commanded them. And though the faithful ones who may be living in a particular place, and who must, under the Divine command, form themselves into such a society or community, must necessarily be separated by distance of place, from other similar communities, “scattered abroad,” yet these various believers, so compacted together into various *Churches*, or *ecclesiastical* assemblies, are by the Lord regarded as but one, and ought to be so regarded by one another—“one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling : one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

As every family, and every nation is, respectively, under government, according to Divine appointment, so the community which is formed by the Redeemer, consisting of believers or faithful ones, is plac-

ed by Himself under a system of regulations, having in view His own supreme dignity and honour, and His people's happiness and comfort. As, in this world which lieth under the power of the wicked one, the authority of the Redeemer is despised and disowned, and as those who are believers in Him were once like others, giving all the homage they could render, not to Him, but to his enemies, it was manifestly necessary, just and right, that in giving laws for the regulation of the belief and action of this redeemed Society, the first thing should be, to proclaim on his part, and to have recognised and acknowledged on the part of His people, the supreme authority of Him who had called them out of darkness into His marvellous light. And it is obvious that as this was necessary at first, so it is no less necessary still, in as much as there remains in every individual believer a tendency which nothing but death shall sever from him, and which nothing but the favour of Him who hath called him can restrain, to give that worship and service to the creature, which is due only to the Creator ; and as the spiritual enemies of God's people, mysteriously permitted to have great power, and never in want of human instruments to attempt the accomplishment of their purposes, are ever striving to win them back to the service of Satan—Knowing that the renunciation by believers of this initiatory and fundamental truth must lead to the renunciation of many more truths, which flow from it—believers, having vowed supreme homage to their Divine Master, and having been called by His authority, to form themselves into “a Congregation of faithful men,” are constantly reminded of their danger and their duty, by the warning cry of the Bible —“ To the law and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” And hence every separate portion of the one Church of Christ, in which there is apt to spring up, and to show itself, that tendency to sin which exists in every individual member thereof, ought also very frequently to institute an examination as to whether there be a correspondence between its belief and its deportment, as a community, and the Divine Rule of Him, under whose sole authority it has been constituted.

The first thing then which is to be believed and acknowledged, in connection with the government of the Church of Christ, is the supreme and absolute authority of the Divine Governor himself. He is the source of all authority and power—and His people must not only believe this in their hearts—but must openly and publicly, as a community, or “ Congregation of faithful men,” acknowledge it. But Christ is not now personally on earth, to administer His laws to His people. He does this by the instrumentality of men ; and it is very remarkable that in those parts of the Bible in which the Redeemer speaks to and of the persons to whom the administration of His laws should be entrusted, He

the churches, to consult and advise with, about the most effectual way in which the Redeemer's purposes might be accomplished by those institutions which had been formed by Him, and which are under His Sovereign control.

Such is the history, and such are some of the causes which operated in the production of what have become known as Symbols or Confessions of faith. Such Symbols as were drawn up by most churches at this period of revival, are found to embody Divine truth, chiefly in the way of reference to, and condemnation of those errors which had previously prevailed.—And when it is considered that most of those who were called to take an active and prominent part in promoting the revival, had become, through sinful infirmity, more or less contaminated with the errors and abominations of the systems of iniquity which then so generally prevailed—as the light even of Divine truth breaks gradually upon the mind of man—it ought not greatly to surprise us, that the Symbols of faith of the churches of that period should exhibit only or chiefly those portions of Divine truth which were found to bear against existing and loud crying enormities, or that they should even afford lamentable proof that the gross darkness which had covered the earth and the people was so very gross, that from its dreadful consequences their souls were but imperfectly delivered. But, though all this ought not greatly to surprise us—it is matter of surprise to men—it is the cause of judicial chastisement on the part of the Omnipresent Witness and the Supreme Judge of churches and nations—and it ought to be matter for lamentation and prayer on the part of those who have the true light in all their dwellings, that any churches should be found, who, after a long night of death, had in Sovereign mercy enjoyed the refreshment of the morning dawn of a day of revival, should rest satisfied with the dim twilight and its blessings, instead of prayerfully longing for and striving to obtain the noon-day glory of the Sun of Righteousness. Directed to the churches, the injunction is recorded, and shall not be recalled—"leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, go on unto perfection!"

Not only on the continent of Europe, but in the British Islands, had there been preserved some faithful witnesses for Christ during the long and dreary period of the reign of superstition and sin. There also, as elsewhere, followers of Christ appeared: and though they were compelled to wander in deserts and on mountains, and to hide themselves in dens and caves of the earth, yet, nourished in soul by the doctrine concerning Christ crucified, they were called, one generation after another, to enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God—but not until, with varying success, they had imparted to those who were to follow them, the knowledge of those Divine statutes which had been their songs in the house of their pilgrimage. About the middle of the six-

teenth century, faithful witnesses for Christ, then become more numerous than previously, and stimulated to a more open testimony in behalf of the truth by the consideration of the recent revival of pure and undefiled religion on the continent, publicly proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation, in England, Ireland, and Scotland. The Lord gave testimony to the word of His grace. Many believed, and turned unto the Lord. But many circumstances concurred to prevent the full development of the truth, and the public acknowledgement of the whole counsel of God. Henry the Eighth, then King of England, had written a work in defence of one of those commandments of men, which the papacy, with such fatal results to imperishable souls, had so long presumed to uphold and propagate: for which service that monarch was rewarded by the Pope with the title of "Defender of the Faith." And though, to gratify his own voluptuousness, the King afterwards succeeded in rejecting the supremacy over himself of his former tyrant, yet the history even of the latter part of his reign serves to prove, that he had no scriptural idea of the obligations under which he lay to recognise Christ as the Supreme Governor among the nations—and that it was as far as possible from his intention to permit the faithful witnesses for Christ within his Kingdom, to form themselves into churches under the authority of Him who is Head over all things to His body, and who has appointed in it office-bearers distinct from the Civil Magistrate, who are amenable, for the administration of His Divine laws, as they affect His body, to their Divine Lord alone. During this reign, an effort was put forth, by the combined power of England and Scotland, to unseat the Chief Prelate of Christendom from the throne of temporal and ecclesiastical supremacy, which for ages, had there, by his commissioner, been occupied.—The effort proved successful. But though, in England, the topmost branch of this tree of evil, had by main force been scathed and withered,—this, as having, in its proud wavings, alone interfered so interestedly with the wanton luxury of the Monarch, was alone assailed—yet the stem and root were not merely untouched, but protected by the fostering hand of him who was ambitious of retaining the title, so suspiciously acquired, of "Defender of the Faith." The doctrines of the Gospel, during the reign of Henry the Eighth can hardly be said to have made any sensible progress in beneficially affecting the sentiments of the English nation. They rapidly spread during the reign of his successor, Edward the Sixth. Their growth was checked during the still shorter reign of Philip and Mary, who were avowed advocates and supporters of the papacy, and who imbued their hands with the blood of many of the servants of the Redeemer. During the long reign of Elizabeth, extending over a period of forty-five years, the number of the faithful witnesses for Christ continued to increase.

When, by the preaching of the truth, and the circulation of the Bible,

in the language of the country, a church of Christ, or “a congregation of faithful men” was formed, the right of the King to bear rule over such a body was disputed, even in Henry’s reign. The voice, however, which was raised on this important subject was then but feeble, and indistinctly heard, because the number of the faithful was then but small. This assumed supremacy of the crown in ecclesiastical affairs still continued to be maintained during the reign of Edward: but as the attention of the venerable men who then took a prominent part in the work of revival came to be directed not only to the errors to be removed, but also to the opposing truths of revelation which should be embraced, formed into a system, and established, and as they found, while they proceeded in their investigations of the Bible, that the doctrines to be believed, the mode of worship to be observed, the government of the church to be established and maintained, and the discipline to be exercised in the church, were subjects, all necessarily connected with and dependent on each other,—there is much reason for believing that had the life of Edward been spared, the character of the church of Christ, in all these matters, which might have been established in England, would have been very different from that which prevails in the *Church of England*, even to the present day. The same supremacy of the crown in ecclesiastical affairs continued to be claimed, and was exercised with greater rigour than before, by Queen Elizabeth. By the exercise of this claim, all the exertions to place the church on a scriptural basis, that had been made by Edward, were by Elizabeth repudiated and abandoned. The doctrines to be believed by the Church, the mode of the worship of God that should be followed, the government of the Church, and the character of its office-bearers were all regulated and moulded, according to the will of the monarch; and it is a fact well established, that the Sovereign displayed her supreme will in all these matters, with the view of upholding certain parts at least of the system of the papacy, to which she was passionately devoted. It was the exercise of this claim of supremacy which gave so strong a colouring to all the transactions of that deeply interesting period in the history of England.

When the authority of the Pope was abolished in England, prelacy, or the system which forms the subordinate parts of the papacy, was suffered to remain. The monarch sought not to abolish it—for most of the men who composed it, instead of standing in the way of his purposes, eagerly obeyed the monarch’s call to accomplish them; or but feebly resisted his intrusions into a province, over which, according to the declared will of God, no civil magistrate, whether supreme or subordinate, has any control. It is a remarkable fact, that of all the chures that were formed at the period of the Reformation, the Church of England was the only one which retained prelacy as the form of church govern-

inent, And it is no less remarkable that the prelates of that period, most of them eminent men in many respects, united in testifying that they did not regard the system of prelacy as having authority from the word of God—but that it was merely a human invention, however ancient, which it was convenient and expedient, in certain circumstances, to maintain. And further, they manifested the greatest desire to hold brotherly communion with the churches on the continent of Europe to whom God had given freedom, even more than they themselves enjoyed, from the bondage of Rome.

One of the circumstances which contributed to prevent the extensive dissemination of the truth throughout England, at the time of its first revival in that country, was that the learned and eminent men who had avowed their rejection of the more prominent errors of the papacy, in the public debates and controversies in which they were instructed by Henry to engage with the advocates of that system, made their appeal so seldom, to the only infallible standard of judgment and decision, the written word of God. Into the dark and blinding mazes of tradition, antiquity, and false philosophy, they too often allowed themselves to be conducted by their opponents—the consequence of which was, so far as the people were concerned, a confirming them in their state of uncertainty, as to which of the two sets of the antagonists was right, and which wrong.

And another circumstance which operated most powerfully in preventing the public, national recognition of the whole counsel of God, was the putting forth of a claim by Henry, on behalf of himself, and every one of his successors on the throne of England, that the Monarch of England is supreme judge in all *Church* matters, as well as all those of a *civil* nature. The putting forth of such a claim, in that period of ignorance, needs not very greatly surprise us, when we recollect that for so many centuries, all the Kings and other rulers of all the nations of Western Europe, as well as their subjects, had been left in ignorance of the life giving truth of the living God, which so clearly points out the reciprocal duties of the various communities which God has established in the world. Upon the originators, advocates, and upholders of the papacy, as a system, is chargeable the awful load of guilt, connected with, and arising out of the universal ignorance which so long prevailed.—The papacy called itself *the Church*—the nations, rulers and ruled, not liking to retain God in their knowledge, and consenting to wear the mark of the beast, and the number of his name, believed the lie—the open witnesses for Christ were tormented and slain; their souls being received to glory—the spirit of God, quenched and provoked, withdrew. All lands mourned, and all dwellers therein languished. And when the conscience and will of many Rulers, untutored and unenlightened

by the truth as it is in Jesus, awoke from the long, irrational slumber into which the papacy had cast them, they made their own conscience and will the rule of their procedure, instead of Christ's law, of which they were willingly ignorant. Having most rightfully freed themselves from the most degrading bondage, both of soul and body, princes and subjects alike were under a very great temptation to feel and say—" who is Lord over us?" Instead of pondering the wonderful combination of providential arrangements by which the Divine and Supreme Ruler had been preparing for and inviting their escape, all, without exception, in whatever station, were in great danger, and before that danger, England, with many other nations fell, of adopting the language of vain glorious exultation—"by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom ; for I am prudent." Few there were, at that critical period in the history of nations, churches, families, and individuals, that were found, engraving on their hearts, and perpetuating for the benefit of posterity, on ecclesiastical and national records, the solemn thanksgiving and dedication of themselves and their all to the Lord—" O Lord our God, thou hast wrought all our works in us. Other Lords besides thee have had dominion over us ; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name :" saying to one another, " come and let join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."

Five years before the death of Henry, which took place in 1547, Mary the Queen of Scotland commenced her reign, which extended over the period during which Edward the Sixth, and Philip and Mary, the successors of Henry, occupied the throne of England, and also over the first ten years of the reign of Elizabeth. At the close of that eventful period in the history of Scotland—a period resembling a long dark night of ceaseless storm among Scotland's hills and valleys, when the various elements of nature seem to be at war with each other, and when the returning morn is longed for, that the sleepless spectator may know what, if any thing, has been preserved—the church of the Redeemer in that land was beheld, though all breathless and exhausted, occupying a position of strength and safety—" looking forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners."

Two most effectual means, by the blessing of God, which contributed to this were—the faithfulness of the Ministers of the Gospel, in declaring unreservedly the whole counsel of God, to all the people, of every rank and condition in life—and the freedom which, as from the Redeemer, these Ministers claimed and often enjoyed of meeting together in solemn assemblies, in company with many representatives of the people who had become members of the Church of Christ, to ascertain from one another, as fellow presbyters or elders, overseers of the flock of Christ, how the work of winning souls to Christ, which, by the Holy

Spirit, had been assigned to them, advanced and prospered, and to stimulate and encourage one another amidst the manifold dangers which not only threatened their peace but their life.

James the Sixth, the son of Mary, succeeded his mother on the throne of Scotland in 1567. James appeared at first to be very favourably disposed to the doctrines of the Gospel, as set forth especially in the public Symbols or Confessions of faith of 1560, and 1580—but as his eye came to be directed to the throne of the more wealthy and powerful Kingdom of England, he manifested a desire to hearken to the counsel of the adherents of the papacy, by whom the Kingdom was still infested, and the throne not unfrequently surrounded. With a view to remove as many obstacles as possible out of the way of his accession to the English throne, he held a secret correspondence with the Pope, whose influence in the settlement of all English affairs was still great, through the many adherents of the popish system who filled many important and influential situations in that Kingdom—and for the same purpose, James at the same time held frequent and confidential intercourse with some of the most ambitious and elevated of the prelates of England. From the moment when James saw the way somewhat clear and open to his elevation to the English throne, after the death of Elizabeth, he set himself to the accomplishment of two kindred objects—the restoration to favour and importance in the Kingdom of many of the influential adherents of the papacy—and the introduction of prelacy into the Church of Scotland, with himself as monarch at the head of it, as supreme Governor. James found that the most formidable obstacle which stood in his way to prevent his accomplishment of the latter object was the privilege which the Ministers claimed and had long enjoyed of meeting in assemblies, free and unfettered by any authority save that of the word of God, which lay before them for their direction and guidance. The King attempted to overawe such assemblies, in their deliberations on the worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Christ. That plan failing of success, he had recourse to the method of making prelates himself; and having invested some with temporal dignity, he sent them as lords and rulers into the assemblies of the Church. But these assemblies, instead of recognizing any such lordly power as lawful to be exercised over the body of Christ, with one voice of honest and righteous indignation, declared them, in Christ's name and by his authority stript of the power of ruling in the Church of Christ at all, so long as they bore the name and the trappings of a lordly authority over the brethren, and failed to confess and forsake the sin committed—and of course implying that if the rule of such men should be permitted in the Church, their rule would necessarily be vitiated by the presence and influence of an element in the government of the Church which

the Divine Head thereof had expressly condemned. It was not to be expected that the King, especially with such prospects before him, brightened by the results of the correspondence he maintained with England and Rome, would be directed by the decisions of men pronounced merely on scriptural and spiritual ground, and who refused to occupy any other. The unequal contest between the spiritual and carnal elements continued to be carried on—and the work of corruption in the Church of Scotland proceeded rapidly. At length, in 1603, James succeeded Elizabeth on the throne of England, although his hereditary pretensions were not acknowledged and ratified by the English Parliament for twelve months after his accession.

A few years before James left Scotland, he published several works. In one of them, he vindicates "absolute and arbitrary power in the prince, and maintains the duty of passive obedience and non-resistance on the part of subjects, without any exception. He allows that the King should regard himself as ordained for the good of the people—but that, if he shall think and act otherwise, and choose to run the risk of Divine punishment, the people are not permitted to make any resistance but by flight, as we may see by the example of brute beasts and unreasonable creatures, among whom we never read or heard of any resistance to their parents, except among the vipers." In another of his works, entitled a "Royal present," and intended as a code of instructions to his Son, James maintains—"that the office of a King is of a mixed kind, partly civil and partly ecclesiastical : that a principal part of his function consists in ruling the Church : that it belongs to him to judge when preachers wander from their text, and that such as refuse to submit to his judgment in such cases, ought to be capitally punished : that no ecclesiastical assemblies ought to be held without his consent : that no man is more to be hated by a King than a proud puritan : that equality amongst Ministers is irreconcilable with monarchy, inimical to order, and the mother of confusion : that equality in the Church should be banished, prelacy set up, and all who preached against prelates rigorously punished." At the very time when James entertained and printed these sentiments, he was publicly, and with apparent solemnity, declaring to the Church and to the nation of Scotland, that he had no intention whatever of altering the government of the Church, or of introducing prelacy !

When James reached England he found that the voice of an overwhelming majority of his subjects in that Kingdom who had embraced the doctrines of Christianity was loud and clear, to the effect that the all important subjects of the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church should be considered with a greater degree of care

than had yet been bestowed on them, and that, in such consideration, more deference should be paid to the authority of God, and less to the judgments and decisions of men.

James was fond of popularity, and very desirous to be regarded as a great scholar. In the course of his reign he summoned especially two assemblies for the purpose of considering the subjects which had thus prominently been brought under his notice by his people. But, instead of allowing the office-bearers of the Church to consider these subjects, in an unconstrained, unfettered manner, with an injunction to make known to him what was their judgment, on these matters, after attentive and prayerful examination of the Bible—the monarch thought fit, after concert with the leading prelates of England, to appoint them, with some others whom he selected, to constitute assemblies for the purposes specified. And in these assemblies or conferences, the monarch presided, argued, debated, determined. It required no great sagacity to foresee that it would be regarded almost as a point of loyalty to the Prince, to say and to do as he bade them. The result of all these very peculiarly constituted assemblies was to rivet on the neck of the Church and nation of England a system of ritual observances, of which James himself while in Scotland, and while the crown of England was but in dim and distant perspective before him, had given this very significant and characteristic description. At a meeting of one of the assemblies of the Church of Scotland, he took it upon him, quite uncalled for, to say—“I praise God that I was born in such a place as to be King in such a Kirk, the purest Kirk in the world. The Kirk of Geneva keepeth Pasch, or Easter, and Yule. What have they for them? They have no divine institution for them. As for our neighbour Kirk in England, their service is an ill-mumbled mass in English: they want nothing of the mass but the liftings. I charge you, my good people, ministers, elders, nobles, gentlemen and barons, to stand to your purity; and I, as long as I brook my life and crown, shall maintain the same against all deadly.” So far as the declaration regarding the service of the Church of England was concerned, it met with a somewhat striking confirmation, when, three years after James began to reign in England, on the occasion of the celebration of the festival of one of the Saints of the Church of England, when two Frenchmen were present to witness the spectacle, one of whom said,—“I do not see what should hinder the Churches of Rome and England to unite”—and the other remarking—“there is nothing of the mass wanting here but the adoration of the host.”

James, surrounded by servile courtiers, and finding himself received by the prelates of England as “the Supreme Governor of the Church—the chief Governor of all estates of the realm, whether they be ec-

clesiastical or civil," found himself, for a time at least, at liberty to develop in public actings the sentiments which he entertained, and which he had given to the world, in the works referred to. And though the nation rang with the sound of plots discovered, and more preparing—though the hand of oppression was often at work, and the voice of the oppressed became louder and more frequent—James found none of his subjects in England so faithful and so honest in disclosing the cause of all this, and in pointing out the only sure remedy, as he once found in his ancient Kingdom of Scotland, where, in an interview granted by James to certain Ministers, on the occasion of alarms created by the machinations of popish and prelatic lords, Andrew Melville, addressing him, said—"Sire, we will always humbly reverence your Majesty in public, but since we have this occasion to be with your Majesty in private, and since you are brought into extreme danger both of your life and crown, and along with you, the country and the Church of God are like to go to wreck, for not telling you the truth, and giving you faithful counsel, we must discharge our duty, or else be traitors both to Christ and you. Therefore, Sir, as divers times before I have told you, so now again I must tell you, there are two Kings and two Kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James, the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose Kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. We will yield to you your place, and give you all due obedience; but again I say, you are not the head of the Church: you cannot give us that Eternal life which we seek for, and you cannot deprive us of it. Permit us then freely to meet in the name of Christ, and to attend to the interests of that church, of which you are a chief member. Sir, when you were in your swaddling clothes, Christ Jesus reigned freely in this land, in spite of all his enemies; his officers and ministers convened for the ruling and welfare of his Church, which was ever for your welfare, when these same enemies were seeking your destruction. And now, when there is more than extreme necessity for the continuance of that duty, will you hinder and dishearten Christ's servants and your most faithful subjects, quarrelling them for their convening, when you should rather commend and countenance them, as the godly kings and emperors did?" The reign of James in England terminated in 1625, when he was succeeded by his Son Charles the First. This unhappy monarch seems to have made abundant use of the *Royal present* which his Father James had bequeathed to his family. The fatal instructions given in that book, Charles appears to have implicitly followed and obeyed—and the fruits of that obedience were witnessed in the sad calamities which overspread the land during his reign, which was brought to an awful close by his public execution in the year 1649. It was during his reign that the Westminster Assem-

bly was held. In June 1643 the two Houses of Parliament issued an ordinance or summons for the convening of that Assembly. Their ordinance was expressed in the following words : “ Whereas, amongst the infinite blessings of Almighty God upon this nation, none is, or can be more dear to us, than the purity of our Religion ; and for that as yet many things remain in the Liturgy, discipline, and government of the Church, which do necessarily require a further and more perfect reformation, than hath yet been attained ; and whereas it hath been declared and resolved by the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament, that the present Church government by Archbishops, Bishops, their Chancellors, Commissaries, Deans, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and other Ecclesiastical Officers depending upon the Hierarchy is evil and justly offensive and burdensome to the Kingdom, a great impediment to the reformation and growth of Religion, and very prejudicial to the state and government of this Kingdom ; and that therefore they are resolved that the same shall be taken away, and that such a government shall be settled in the Church, as may be most agreeable to God’s holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other reformed Churches abroad ; and for the better effecting hereof, and for the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the Church of England, from all false calumnies and aspersions, it is thought fit and necessary to call an assembly of learned, godly, and judicious Divines, to consult and advise of such matters and things, touching the premises, as shall be proposed unto them by both, or either of the Houses of Parliament, and to give their advice and counsel therein, to both, or either of the said Houses, when, and as often as they shall be thereunto required. Be it therefore ordained by the Lords and Commons in this present Parliament assembled, that all and every the persons hereafter in this present ordinance named, that is to say—[then follow the names of about a hundred and fifty persons, an overwhelming majority of whom were Ministers and Members of the Church of England]—and such other person and persons as shall be nominated and appointed by both Houses of Parliament, or so many of them as shall not be letted by sickness, or other necessary impediment, shall meet and assemble, and are hereby required and enjoined upon summons signed by the clerks of both Houses of Parliament, left at their several respective dwellings, to meet and assemble themselves at Westminster, in the chapel called Henry the Seventh’s chapel, on the first day of July, in the year of our Lord, one thousand six hundred forty three ; and after the first meeting, being at least of the number of forty, shall from time to time sit, and be removed from place to place ; and also that the said assembly shall be dissolved in such manner as by both Houses of Parliament shall be directed : and the said persons, or so many of them as shall be so assem-

bled, or sit, shall have power and authority, and are hereby likewise enjoined, from time to time, during this present Parliament, or until further order be given, by both the said Houses, to confer and treat amongst themselves, of such matters and things, touching and concerning the Liturgy, Discipline, and Government of the Church of England, or the vindicating and clearing of the doctrine of the same from all false aspersions and misconstructions, as shall be proposed unto them by both or either of the said Houses of Parliament, and no other, and to deliver their opinions and advices of, or touching the matters aforesaid, as shall be most agreeable to the word of God, to both or either of the said Houses, from time to time, in such manner and sort, as by both or either of the said Houses of Parliament, shall be required, and the same not to divulge by printing, writing, or otherwise, without the consent of both or either House of Parliament. And be it further ordained by the authority aforesaid, that William Twisse, Doctor in Divinity, shall sit in the Chair as Prolocutor of the said Assembly; and if he happen to die, or be letted by sickness, or other necessary impediment, then such other person to be appointed in his place, as shall be agreed on by both the said Houses of Parliament: and in case any difference of opinion shall happen amongst the said persons so assembled, touching any the matters that shall be proposed to them as aforesaid, that then they shall represent the same, together with the reasons thereof, to both or either the said Houses respectively, to the end such further direction may be given therein, as shall be requisite in that behalf. And be it further ordained by the authority aforesaid, that for the charges and expenses of the said Divines, and every of them, in attending the said service, there shall be allowed unto every of them that shall so attend, during the time of their said attendance, and for ten days before and ten days after, the sum of four shillings for every day, at the charges of the commonwealth, at such time, and in such manner as by both Houses of Parliament shall be appointed. And be it further ordained, that all and every the said Divines, so as aforesaid required and enjoined to meet and assemble, shall be freed and acquitted of, and from every offence, forfeiture, penalty, loss or damage, which shall or may arise or grow, by reason of any non-residence or absence of them, or any of them, from his or their, or any of their Church, Churches, or Cures, for, or in respect of their said attendance upon the said service, any law or statute of non-residence, or other law or statute enjoining their attendance upon their respective ministries or charges to the contrary thereof notwithstanding: and if any of the persons before-named shall happen to die before the said Assembly shall be dissolved by order of both Houses of Parliament, then such other person or persons shall be nominated and placed in the room and stead of such person and persons so dying, as by both the said Houses shall be thought fit and agreed upon: and every

such person or persons so to be named shall have the like power and authority, freedom, and acquittal, to all intents and purposes, and also all such wages and allowances for the said service, during the time of his or their attendance, as to any other of the said persons in this ordinance named, is by this ordinance limited and appointed. Provided always that this ordinance, or any thing therein contained, shall not give unto the persons aforesaid, or any of them, nor shall they in this Assembly assume to exercise any jurisdiction, power, or authority ecclesiastical whatever, or any other power, than is herein particularly expressed."

Every person admitted to sit in this Assembly was required to come under the following solemn promise and vow.—“ I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly, whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine, but what I believe to be most agreeable to the word of God ; nor in point of discipline, but what may make most for God’s glory, and the peace and good of this Church.”

On the first of July, 1643, the Assembly met. And towards the end of the same month, the Parliament sent Commissioners into Scotland, with authority to request of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to send such representatives as that Church might select, to assist the Assembly at Westminster in the important deliberations upon which that Assembly had already entered. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland made choice of eight of their number, as Commissioners to the Assembly at Westminster—who arrived in London towards the close of that year, to enter on the discharge of the important duties which they had thus been invited and commissioned to undertake.

It is very necessary to consider the circumstances in which England was placed at the time when this assembly was called. The adherents and supporters of the papacy had for a long time previously been forming themselves into regularly organised bodies, with the view of recovering their former power in the Kingdom, and held the most intimate communication and correspondence with similar bodies, in Scotland, Ireland, and the Popish Kingdoms on the continent of Europe ; and many of the most influential of the upholders of that system occupied prominent situations in the court of the Monarch :—all throughout the Kingdom who had embraced and publicly avowed their belief in the great doctrines of the Gospel saw and considered with grief the lamentable ignorance which prevailed amongst the great body of the inhabitants of the Kingdom, arising from the want of a sufficiently abundant circulation of the Bible, and also from the want of faithful Ministers to declare to the people, with

the living voice, the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ : all such saw also, with deep amazement, that the construction of the outward framework of the Church of Christ, in more exact accordance with the word of God, a work which had been avowedly merely *delayed* by the Reformers in the days of Henry, and Edward and Elizabeth, was not only not thought of, but openly declared to be unnecessary and dangerous, and that every step taken by the nation, as such, instead of being forward to scriptural freedom and purity, was backward to bondage and to Romanism :—the truly enlightened, wise, and good of the Kingdom saw and mourned over all this—and moreover, since they could not conceal from themselves or others the fact that those who formed the system of prelacy, instead of giving themselves wholly to the work of enlightening by means of Divine truth, the minds of all without exception, from the monarch to the peasant, were occupied in attempting to consolidate, under Royal authority, their own order of prelates, into a powerful, political order in the State—and as, further, it was known from one end of the Kingdom to the other, that the chief of their order had dared to re-publish a book which had been published in the preceding reign, authorising public sports on the Lord's Day, in open defiance of the command of Jehovah,—they could not refrain from supplicating that the attention of the Legislature might be speedily and effectually turned to the serious consideration of subjects with which the prosperity and even the safety of the Kingdom was so intimately connected. The King, having unhappily imbibed the shocking principles inculcated and acted on by his father, with respect to the government which *he* maintained should prevail both in the State and the Church of Christ, surrounded by vain and regardless courtiers, and especially swayed by the counsels of ambitious prelates, absolutely refused to make any alterations in any of the matters which were seen and felt to be so urgent by the unanimous voice of the religious and well affected of the community. The Church, that is, the society of the faithful, or “the congregation of faithful men” in England, were now becoming more familiarly acquainted with the truth, so clearly exemplified in the Bible, that the Church has a right, from the Divine Governor, to meet, in assemblies of her scripturally appointed office-bearers, to consider all the matters which appertain to the scriptural management of its affairs, and to the most effectual method, under the Divine blessing, of advancing the Kingdom of Christ by the conversion of the ignorant and the thoughtless around. And, though such Divinely authorised office-bearers of the Church, the pastors or teachers, the presbyters or elders, the overseers of the flock, as the only true bishops, had not yet in England proceeded to do what their brethren in Scotland had done, namely, to exercise the discipline of the Church upon prelatical men who presumed, by the introduction of a political element into the purely ministerial character, to lord it over

their brethren, and thus positively to vitiate and render invalid the various Divinely appointed ordinances in which they might engage, and under the haughty pretence too, that their prelatical interference was needful to constitute ordinances *apostolical*—though the overseers of the Church of England had not proceeded to do what it was their duty in this matter to do, notwithstanding whatever trouble or persecution might come upon them for so doing—yet there was another body of men in the Kingdom of England at that time who interfered with the order of the prelates. They were not ecclesiastics, stripping of a pretended Divine authority some who attempted to exercise lordship over the brethren and equals of the ecclesiastical community. They were civil office-bearers, magistrates in the body politic, who virtually said to the prelatical order, through their chief—we the civil magistrates of the Kingdom of England, subordinate to the King who is the supreme civil ruler, find that you, wearing the name of the servants of Christ in His Church, are not content with such name, and do not confine yourselves to the work which that name implies:—we do not presume to deprive you of that name, or to urge your performance of the duties which your office as Ministers of the Gospel enjoins: that, if you are unworthy of the name, and if you fulfil not your duties, is a business which devolves on others, even your brethren in the Ministry, not on us: neither do we desire to prevent you as our fellow subjects in the Kingdom from striving to obtain places of even the highest distinction under the Crown, should the King see meet that you, as subjects, should enjoy them—but it is our determination that if you occupy the places of Civil Counsellors to the Crown, you shall do so simply in the capacity of Civil Rulers and not wearing in addition to this, the character of Ecclesiastical Rulers:—if your brethren permit you, in the exercise of a *twofold* ambition, to overrule them, you shall not, in the use of this two-edged weapon rule over us:—and this our determination is formed upon the principle of reason and equity, that if any man have *one* occupation, that one occupation is more than sufficient to occupy all his talents and all his zeal—which principle is Divinely confirmed by the *Apostolical* injunction, “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.” Therefore it was declared in the above summons of the Parliament of England for the meeting of the Assembly, that “the present church government by Archbishops, Bishops, their Chancellors, Commissaries, Deans, Deans and Chapters, Archdeacons, and other Ecclesiastical officers, depending upon the hierarchy, is evil and justly offensive and burdensome to the Kingdom, a great impediment to Reformation and growth of Religion, and very prejudicial to the state and government of this Kingdom.” And this also is the reason why none of those who were actually prelates, none who had presumed to raise themselves by the aid of the civil authority to the unscriptural station

and work of ruling over their brethren in the Ministry were called to sit in this Assembly. England and Scotland also had by this time more than enough of the decisions, and Canons of Assemblies, ruled over, dictated to, and overawed by the Monarch and his lordly prelates. The Assembly at Westminster was an Assembly of *brethren*; and, to have summoned any who laid claim, either on the ground of convenience as a desirable human invention, or on the ground of Divine right, to a position of *pre-eminence above* their brethren, would have been a manifest inconsistency and absurdity. But the greater number of the Ministers who were invited to sit in the Assembly, were avowedly Presbyters, Overseers, that is, true Bible-bishops, in the Church of England, over whom, by royal authority, the prelates had been stationed. And these Ministers of the Church of England had been selected as members of the Assembly, on account of the talent, learning, and godliness by which they were generally known to be distinguished, quite irrespective of the peculiar views they might entertain on the question of church government. They, with all others who composed the Assembly occupied, with respect to one another, a position of equality; that is, each member was free to declare his sentiments, equally with every other member, under a sense of the responsibility intimated by his deliberately taken promise and vow—these expressed sentiments of each member being allowed to weigh, according to their felt worth and value, when the judgement of the whole body was required to be given concerning the several matters which were under consideration. Though, however, none of the Ministers in the Assembly were actually prelates, several of them, in the course of the discussions, proved themselves to be eager advocates of the system of prelacy. This advocacy was by no means prevented by the Assembly, on the contrary, the freest possible expression of opinion was invited and encouraged; but as the appeal, in the question of church government, and in all other questions that came before them, lay to the law and the testimony of God, it was soon discovered by such as entertained prelatical views, that many things which they had hitherto implicitly received in consequence chiefly of a reference to the authority of man as supreme, could not abide the application of the test of the word of God. The discovery of this, and the Divinely imparted desire, in the use of the aids of prayer and the uncounteracted light of the Bible, naturally and necessarily led to the recorded judgments and decisions of many of them on the matters before them; while those who had previously entertained views of the superiority of prelatical church government to any other, and who felt unwilling to submit to the Supreme authority of the Bible, in the matter, withdrew from the Assembly, so soon as they saw in what direction the expressed views of the various meinbers were turned.

Of such individuals then, was the Westminster Assembly composed. And, with respect to the authority under which it sat, it is well to know and remember, that it was called by both Houses of Parliament—two of the three branches of the Civil power in Britain, according to the Constitution of the Kingdom : the third branch of that power, the King, being at that time in the field of Civil war, with a view of asserting, by force of arms, those principles of government, not only in the State but in the Church of Christ which he had imbibed, and which, unhappily for himself and the whole Kingdom, he was prompted by vain and pre-latical Counsellors, to maintain and defend. And such an Assembly as was thus constituted, Charles had, like his Father, often refused to call. He found that his own views of supremacy over the Church were confirmed and strengthened by such Counsellors as surrounded him, and who, it is obvious, had so deep and selfish an interest in the course which their Royal master might follow. As overseers of the flock, which the Chief Shepherd had collected in the Kingdom by the blessing of the Holy Spirit accompanying the reading and the preaching of the truth which maketh free, men such as those who formed that Assembly had a right from Christ to meet together for all the purposes specified in the summons of Parliament : and when they found some of the Civil Rulers publicly avowing their belief that purity of religion was an infinite blessing, and was dear to them ; declaring also their conviction that there were many things remaining in the Liturgy, Discipline and Government of the Church of England which required a further and more perfect Reformation than was yet obtained—a conviction not confined to the two Houses of Parliament in 1643, but one which had been expressed by all the eminent Reformers of the days of Henry, Edward and Elizabeth, and expressed too, notwithstanding and in spite of their own interested submission to prelacy : when it was also found that the Monarch, under the fatal influence of the counsels of ambitious prelates, not only set himself against any further reformation, but that under the sanction of Royal authority, the commandments of the Almighty were openly violated, and that the Nation was falling back to the dominion of popish darkness with alarming rapidity—when the men who had been summoned to meet in Assembly at Westminster saw and considered all this, they hesitated not in deciding that their inherent right of meeting together, flowing from Christ, was not weakened, but on the contrary corroborated by the offered protection and support of a delegated and acknowledged authority. And it cannot for a moment be doubted that if the King, both Houses of Parliament *opposing*, had summoned such an Assembly, or even an Assembly to embrace all the Ministers of the Gospel within the realm, even the prelates to form component parts of it, with an assurance that no interference on his part should be made to a free and unfettered discussion

and decision of the various specified subjects, supreme deference being paid to no authority but that of the Bible—no one, at all acquainted with the character of the men of that period, can entertain a doubt, that if the summons for an Assembly had proceeded from the Crown, the voice of the Monarch would with eager joy have been responded to, and the opposing voice of both Houses of Parliament silently yet steadily disregarded. Had such a course been followed, what unspeakable blessings might have been experienced throughout Britain *then*, not to be confined to one age, but to extend throughout every succeeding age of the history of her people, whether at home or in other lands !

The Assembly entered on its important business of prayer for the Spirit's guidance—of serious and friendly deliberation, discussion and debate, on the various questions concerning the doctrines, worship, government, and discipline which ought to prevail and be maintained in the Church of Christ : and the fruit of their labours, which extended over a period of nearly five years, has been and still continues to be enjoyed by many of the Churches of the Redeemer, not only in the British empire, but throughout the world. The question which occupied most of their time and attention, was that which related to the form of Church government which ought to be adopted, and which could be proved from Scripture to be most conformable to the will of God. The most patient investigation was given to this very important matter. And the unanimity which was displayed at the close of the discussions on this subject was truly astonishing, considering the apparently discordant elements which were occasionally manifested in the debates of the Assembly.

The result of the discussions and deliberations of the Westminster Assembly on the subject of Church government is given in the “Form of Presbyterial Church government, and of ordination of Ministers,” which is usually placed near the end of the volume commonly entitled “the Confession of Faith.” The serious and prayerful perusal of this “Form” is hereby most earnestly pressed upon all, especially on the office bearers and members of the Presbyterian Church of Canada. And especially it is urged upon you to compare most diligently the statements contained in the propositions of this Form with the passages of the Bible referred to in it, or with such passages as you yourselves may discover in the Scriptures, and which to your minds may be still more pertinent and relevant as Divine proof of the truth concerning Church government which these propositions were intended to embody. That there are prevalent in general society and in the professing Church of Christ at the present day a fearful amount of ignorance and error on the subject of Church government, cannot be denied. Such ignorance is to be removed, and such error counteracted only in the diligent and prayerful

use of means. And, as the truth on this subject is a part of the whole counsel of God, whereby the Church of Christ is to be confirmed and edified, and as the office of the Ministry is not fully discharged, unless the whole counsel of God is delivered—let the servants of Christ who are appointed to teach and to rule, make use of the means with which the word of God is so richly fraught.

Notwithstanding the unequivocal statements of the Bible, that there is a Divinely appointed government in the Church of Christ, it is by many denied that there is any government at all:—although it is authoritatively declared in the Bible, that there are only *two classes* of office bearers in the Church of Christ, those belonging to the one class, to teach and to rule, those forming the other, to distribute the temporal offerings of the wealthier among the poorer members; it is maintained that there are *three* such classes, those forming them bearing names which the most learned and the most illiterate alike may in vain search for in the Bible, and one of the words, namely the word *bishop*, used to designate one of the two classes of office bearers, having a meaning attached to it, which the Bible most emphatically condemns—that word signifying, in the Bible, an *overseer of the flock of Christ*, whereas it is most unwarrantably made by the adherents of prelacy to signify an *overseer of overseers*, a *lord to rule over brethren*:—notwithstanding the Divine injunction, that the presbyters, the brethren in the Ministry, or the overseers of the flock of Christ, in every age, should set apart or *ordain* to the same work, such faithful men as may have received sufficient training, “*by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*;” it is asserted that prelates, or those who have sought and obtained pre-eminence over their brethren, overseers of *overseers*, have alone a right so to set apart or ordain men to the work of the ministry of the Gospel, and that wherever such a prelatical *imposition* has not been practised, there is no ministry of the Gospel at all, and no Church of Christ at all:—the history of *the Church* has by such men been searched, and it has been found that three or four hundred years after Christ and His Apostles left this world, the system of prelacy, or overseers of overseers began to assume a somewhat regular shape and form—the third or fourth century therefore, is, by the adherents of that system, pronounced the purest period in the history of the Church of Christ, far purer than the times of Christ and His Apostles: and the system of prelacy, especially that part of it which gives the power of ordination of Ministers to prelates, is fondly styled *Apostolical*; and the assumed right to *perpetuate* this system is maintained to be a right Divine! And, though one of the most eminently learned of the prelatrical order in England, *awake* to the folly of attempting to occupy such high and exclusive ground, and content

to place prelacy on the low ground of human expediency for a season, pronounced all to be “*madmen*,” who held this doctrine which the Bible so emphatically condemns; and although the first Reformers in England desired to have the Church of England brought to a nearer conformity to the Bible, to a closer resemblance in Church government, to the reformed Churches on the Continent of Europe, and in the Kingdom of Scotland, and of course removed farther away from the ground which began to be occupied in the fourth century by the Church of Rome, and continues to be occupied by that community still—yet, wonderful as it may seem, the number of men is not small, who, practising upon the proverbial credulity of human nature, by the oft repeated cry of *Antiquity*, appear to have considerable success in the art of teaching men to suppose that the voice of a Church in the fourth century ought to have greater weight than the voice of *the* Church’s Head and Lawgiver in the beginning—that what is *old* is therefore *true!* Error is *old*: and it must be combatted, not only with what is *old*, but with what is *true*; the guide to what is true being the word of God, and that alone. Not only must there be a search made for the *old* paths—but we must discover the *good* way, and *walk* therein. When the cry of *Antiquity* is sounded, and sounded again, the opposing cry must be as often raised, “To the Law and to the Testimony!”

Since it is manifest to all then, that on the various topics connected with Church government, the grossest error and delusion are zealously circulated and do extensively prevail: on these various topics let the watchmen give the trumpet of the Gospel, a clear, distinct, and certain sound. And, with the view of deepening and rendering permanent any sound impressions which the exposition of Divine truth, accompanied by the Divine blessing, may make on the mind, it would be well that this department of the Church of Christ, in its several assemblies and congregations, should make an effort to possess and circulate among the members, such publications as may be deemed useful in casting further light upon those subjects which may from time to time form the theme of public instruction by the Ministry. And it must ever be remembered that all such publications are to be used, not as containing the *origin* of Divine truth, but merely as containing an explanation or illustration of some truth, whose origin is in the Bible; and that it is only in proportion as a person, recognising first of all a particular truth as having a Divine origin, seeks for a clearer understanding of that truth than is already attained, that the perusal of any merely human production can be of use as a means, for confirmation and godly edifying in the truths of the Gospel.

And while the overseers of the churches deliver the truth on this

subject, and enforce it with that authority wherewith by the Divine Head they are invested, let the members give earnest and prayerful attention to the truth delivered and enforced, under a feeling of their responsibility for the manner in which the truth is received, and for the use which they make of it. Let this subject form, as every subject in the word of God ought to form, a frequent topic of conversation amongst the members of our churches when they meet together, not disputatiously or with bitterness, but with a mutual desire to impart mutual benefit, and especially with a constant and devout reference to the Supreme authority of Him who is Head over all things to his body the Church. It will be found by such as do so, that all the subjects of the word of God have a necessary and indissoluble connection—and that though the communications of Christians one with another may begin concerning the way in which Christ intimates His will that His Church should be governed, the names of those appointed under Him to govern, and the duties of those by whom these names are borne, especially the duty of ordaining, or setting apart to the work of the ministry those whom the ministry already existing, may find qualified, the way in which various churches in one place should hang together as branches of the one Divine Root and Stem, all of them dependent on Him, drawing nourishment and strength from Him alone, by means of the ordinances which He has instituted—though any one of these topics may form the commencement of friendly and brotherly intercourse, yet the transition will be ere long found to be natural and easy to the consideration of the persons who form the Church itself—what such persons must believe—the standard and test of their belief—what they are required *to do* as well as *to believe*, to prove that they are really and truly component parts of the Church at all—all these topics will be intimately associated—and hence there would often result the searching inquiry, are *we believers*, are *we doers* of God's will? am I holding the Head, even Christ, in all things giving him the pre-eminence! Then would often follow the importunate and united prayer to be reconciled to God, to maintain steadfastness to Christ—the affectionate mutual entreaty to prove all things, to hold fast that which is good—the faithful warning—the honest, mild, and tender reproof of Christian love.

There is not a more calamitous error than that which is so prevalent in the present day, of supposing that the great work of spreading extensively around, the influence of the truth, may with safety be confined to Ministers of the Gospel. In the accomplishment of this great design of God, every follower of Christ has his own department of duty and of privilege. The public duty of the Minister is to teach in public the whole counsel of God—to sow the seed of the spiritual kingdom of the Saviour—and though no private member of any Church may lawfully

teach in public, as that would be interfering with the institution of Him who is the God of order, and as no man should presume to do that for which he has made no sufficient preparation, yet every member, first giving himself to the Lord, first ascertaining that the good seed of the Kingdom has found a welcome place in his own heart, is invited and commanded by Him who has called him, in all the circumstances and occasions of private and social life to show forth the power of the truth by a gentle and holy deportment, by a mild yet firm vindication of the truth of God when it happens to be assailed, not being ashamed to let it be known that he has named, and will by God's grace maintain, allegiance to Christ.

After drawing up the "Form of Church Government," that which next engaged the attention of the Assembly was the consideration of a model or form for the observance of the public worship of God in the various Churches throughout the Kingdom. The result of the labours of the Assembly on this point is also contained in the volume called the Confession of Faith, and is entitled "The Directory for the public worship of God." This Directory was intended to be followed, in the conducting of *public* worship by the churches, instead of that which is commonly known by the name of the Book of Common Prayer. It is the Book of Common Prayer which is referred to by the word *Liturgy*, in the summons of Parliament for the meeting of the Westminster Assembly. The word *Liturgy* signifies *public work*; referring to the *work* or business in which the followers of Christ engage, when they meet in *public* to worship God. In the preface to the Directory for public worship is given a short but admirable statement of some of the reasons why the Church of Christ, desiring not to remain always in a state of childhood, but on the contrary desiring to put away childish things, ought to renounce and abandon the use of a book, which is so manifestly calculated, in so many of its parts, if the persons using it think at all, to impress upon the mind, by so frequent repetition, erroneous views of some of the most important and essential doctrines of the Bible; by the observance of unnumbered saint's days, fast days, and festival days, and by the use of words derived from Greek and Roman communities, bearing a very suspicious *ecclesiastical* character, so much calculated to prevent the outgoing of purely spiritual thought by at least the great proportion of worshippers towards the Divine and Eternal objects of faith, worship, and contemplation. An overwhelming majority of the Ministers of the Church of England, at the time of the sitting of the Westminster Assembly, were convinced of the necessity of renouncing and abandoning the use of the Book of Common Prayer. King James had averred that the Liturgy was "an ill said Mass in English." The celebrated Earl of Chatham, two hundred years after James's time de-

clared—"we have a Popish Liturgy"—and it is matter of history that the Popes who lived in the time of Elizabeth, volunteered to that Queen, to sanction and confirm by their Papal authority, the English Liturgy, which remains to this day, with some alterations more popish than ever, introduced by Charles the Second and his prelates in 1662. The attentive and frequent perusal of the preface to the Directory is recommended to the office-bearers and members of the Churches—and we are persuaded that a greater attention to the Directory itself, both on the part of Ministers and people, would, by the blessing of God, have the happiest effect in promoting a revival of pure and undefiled religion throughout the land.

That which next engaged the attention of the Assembly was the consideration and arrangement of what is properly styled the Confession of Faith—which consists of thirty three chapters, under which, as general heads or divisions, are placed the various doctrines to be believed and practised by the Churches of Christ, and also by individuals, according to the several positions in society which may be assigned to them by the Creator and Supreme Lord.

The Larger Catechism was then drawn up by the Assembly—under a firm persuasion of the very great advantages which would result from teaching the doctrines of the Bible, and intended to be embodied in the Confession, in the way of asking questions, and confirming or correcting the answers which may be given to the questions asked. This Catechism was intended for the use of "such as have made some proficiency in the knowledge of the grounds of Religion." It is very obvious that no faithful Minister of Christ can expect that the public instructions of the sanctuary can be sufficient to remove the ignorance which prevails in the minds of many whom very inferior motives may attract to the company of a large congregation, especially in a country where some discredit would soon attach to the character of a person who might habitually absent himself from public worship. And it is also very plain that every faithful servant of Christ must feel that amidst the numberless temptations to which professing christians are exposed, to whatever class or condition of society they may belong, their views of Divine truth are apt to become unsettled and corrupt—and that, to prevent this process from proceeding, to the endangering of souls, and the injury of Christ's cause in the world, no course on the part of the pastor is so likely by the blessing of God to prove effectual, as that of asking the members of the flock committed to him by the Chief Shepherd, what are their views of Divine truth; and, on ascertaining that all is well, confirming and edifying their souls in their most holy faith: but, should there be manifested the existence of some root of bitterness, springing up to trouble the soul, and if unchecked and tolerated, soon to over-

spread and corrupt the Church at large, the pastor who possesses the wisdom of winning souls, will, with a tender yet faithful hand, direct the most vigilant attention to the danger, and strive, with prayer to God, to root it out. To aid pastors and people in this most needful exercise, the Larger Catechism will be found a most profitable and useful guide.

The preparation of the Shorter Catechism next occupied the time and attention of the Assembly. It was intended for the instruction, on the above mentioned plan of question and answer, of those who may not have made great progress in Divine knowledge. Many christian parents and heads of families, as well as the members of families and households, have found this mode of instruction to be of eminent service in removing the ignorance which naturally overspread the human soul : and the remembrance is still sweet, of the often witnessed domestic scene in our native land, in which there mingled venerated parents, and beloved and loving children and domestics, pondering together the word of God, comparing Scripture with Scripture, with the aid of the admirable guide which is provided in the Shorter Catechism. And there can be no doubt that if the practice were revived, of parents, especially in the evening of the Lord's day, after devout attendance on public worship, calling together their families for the purpose of ascertaining what progress, if any, is made in the knowledge and practice of true godliness, there would speedily be witnessed, not only in our families, but throughout the country, a revival of that righteousness which exalteth a nation, and an avoidance of sin, which is the reproach of any people.

It is constantly to be remembered that the passages of Scripture subjoined to the various statements contained in the Form of church government—in the Directory for public worship—in the Confession of Faith—and in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, were intended by the Westminster Assembly to be essential parts of these public documents. It was necessary that it should be so, since the resolution on which the Assembly acted was that such a government should be settled in the Church, as is most agreeable to God's holy word : and in the use of the documents which form the fruit of the Assembly's labours, by churches, families, and individuals, the benefit which may accrue will be found to be in proportion as the appeal is made “ to the Law and to the Testimony of God.”

The metrical version of the book of Psalms, which the Church of Scotland for nearly two hundred years has used, in a most important part of public worship, was made by Francis Rouse, an eminent Hebrew scholar, and a member of the Parliament which summoned the West-

minster Assembly : it was carefully revised by the Westminster Assembly : it was examined by the General Assembly and Presbyteries of the Church of Scotland, and after receiving some alterations, was attested as a faithful metrical version of that part of the word of God which contains so appropriate and edifying matter for the exercise of praise.

In 1647, the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly returned to Scotland, after an absence of nearly four years, during which period they had signally distinguished themselves by their unremitting and laborious attention to the important business which had been entrusted to that venerable body. On their return, a General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was held, at which the confession of Faith was approved of, after a declaration of the construction which they put on that part of the thirty first chapter which refers to the calling of Ecclesiastical Assemblies by the Civil Magistrate. In the following year, the larger and shorter Catechisms received the approbation of the General Assembly ; as the Directory for public worship, and the Form of Church Government had been approved of by a General Assembly held in 1645 ; these two latter documents having been forwarded to Scotland by the Scottish Commissioners, while the Westminster Assembly was still sitting. The several Acts of the General Assemblies approving of these documents were immediately ratified by the Parliament of Scotland ; and thus, so far as that Kingdom was concerned, the terms of the League between the three Kingdoms were without delay and heartily complied with.

It will be seen that each of these five documents is represented as “a part of the covenanted uniformity in Religion betwixt the churches of Christ in the Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland.” It had been felt, from the beginning of the period of the Reformation, by all the “congregations of faithful men” in those Kingdoms, that it was most desirable and necessary for the several churches of Christ to have one method or rule of procedure, in the various acts which, as parts of one body, they were required by Divine authority to perform in the Divine presence, and before one another, as well as in the view of general society around them. It was felt that as they had one Divine Rule, the word of God ; so the exigencies of the times required that on the great questions of the *belief, worship, government, and discipline* of the Churches, there should be some uniform and regular plan, which all holding the Head might recognise and act upon, as well for their own edification, as with the view of presenting to the world, for the world’s benefit, the idea of *oneness* among those who professed to be one body in Christ. Even though such a plan should be agreed upon by the Churches, there were, throughout the three Kingdoms, various systems of great influence in active op-

eration, to prevent such a plan of uniformity from being followed. There was the system of Popery, which had its *leagued* and vigilant emissaries over the whole Nation. And there was the system of prelacy, at the head of which the Monarch had placed himself. The spirit and object of the Monarch, in heading this latter system, are very graphically set forth by King James, when, on one occasion, he happened to have before him some Ministers of the Gospel pleading for freedom to meet together to consult about the affairs of the Church, he said to them—"To that I will never agree; for the bishops (meaning the prelates) must rule the Ministers, and the King must rule both." To oppose and root out both these systems, and the many evils arising out of them with which the whole country was inundated, an agreement or league was entered into by all those in the Nation who had witnessed the disastrous effects which had resulted from the prevalence of those systems, and who longed that such effects might be counteracted. This document is usually called by the name of the "Solemn League and Covenant." This Covenant was subscribed by both Houses of Parliament in 1643; by the Westminster Assembly: by persons of all ranks in the three Kingdoms in the year following: and was also subscribed by King Charles the Second, on two different occasions in Scotland previous to his restoration to the throne: as a similar Covenant or Bond had been subscribed by James, previous to his accession to the throne of England! It is to be found in the volume which contains the documents which have been already referred to. This Covenant only requires to be diligently perused, with a steady recollection of the circumstances of danger in which the Empire was then placed, to remove from the mind the feeling of derision and obloquy which it is to be feared has long been thrown around the very mention of its name. And if the daily accumulating signs of our times be regarded with an eye at all attentive and enlightened by the sure word of prophecy, it requires no great sagacity to foresee that in the coming storm of God's righteous indignation against professing Christian Churches and Nations, those who would be safe till the calamity be overpast, must bind and pledge themselves together, and to one another as before God—to lead a holy life—to mutual liberty, and the preservation of the Scriptural authority of Civil Rulers—to the extirpation not only of popery and prelacy, but of every other plant which the Divine Father has not planted—and to preserve pure and undefiled Religion, according to the word of God, and the example of the best Reformed Churches, and to endeavour to bring all the Churches to as great a uniformity as possible—which are the very things, and no other than what were aimed at by those who subscribed that Solemn Deed—with what measure of sincerity on the part of some of the Subscribers, the great day of retribution will disclose!

Viewed as an effort on the part of the Churches of Christ in the British Empire, to present the idea of substantial *oneness* to the Empire at large, and to the world, the Westminster Assembly, having thus Covenanted to *be* and *to appear* one, will ever be regarded by all intelligent and impartial Christian patriots with admiration and gratitude. The fact, that the principles which at that time were possessed and maintained by the great majority of the Ministers of the Gospel in England are so little known or so loosely held in the present day, says but little for the strength of that spirit of free inquiry of which this age of professed enlightenment so largely boasts. And if ever the Churches of Christ are to exhibit a substantial uniformity in doctrine, worship, and government—and who can doubt that such an exhibition shall one day be given?—it will be found that the Westminster Assembly presents a model of the principles on which such uniformity must rest. Uniformity amongst the Churches can be established, only when the Churches shall, with one heart and soul, bend to the Supreme authority of the Church's Head, as announced in His written word.

The most effectual and beneficial way in which we can commemorate the Assembly at Westminster, is to consider, as a Church of Christ, after comparing the Bible with the volume in which we profess to believe that there is a Symbol or Compend of Bible truth, and to consider seriously and prayerfully not once or twice, but often, the Heavenly call which is passing along and throughout all the churches of the Reformation at the present day—“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.”

The Lord Jesus Christ is not, and cannot be, without a people. They that are with Him, are called, and chosen, and faithful. Though men may fondly and superstitiously call others *the Church*, these alone are His—and those alone he will at last acknowledge. Of that people, one in heart, though much conspires to disunite them, He is the only Supreme Governor. To this truth the Westminster Assembly bore testimony, and we also must witness in behalf of it. God gathers individuals into a family—making a family a Divine institution, to be used by the Mediator for advancing His work of grace in the world. The fruit of the Assembly's labours gives proof of an abundant testimony to this truth also; and every family among us, unless the stamp of unfaithfulness to God and to Christ is desired to rest upon it, must bear daily testimony to the same. The Almighty Ruler has appointed nations as a Divine institution, to be also used by Christ for the ingathering of His ransomed people; all the power and wealth of nations to be at the disposal of Christ for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes. The Assembly

bore public testimony to this truth likewise; and according to the different stations in a nation which Christians occupy, they also are required to lift their public testimony in its behalf. So far as the nation and its rulers were concerned, the witness-bearing of the Westminster Assembly was to a great extent given in vain : Rulers recognized not civil authority as the moral ordinance of God, and allowed not to Christ the Divinely appointed use of that ordinance for the furtherance of His designs of mercy to the nation, and through that nation to the world : the people thus ruled, in defiance of God's Divine method of government, threw off allegiance to man, who had first renounced allegiance to God—still, the lifting up of a public testimony was the Church's duty, and it was, to a certain extent performed : so in like manner, let not us in these days be deterred from witnessing for all the rights and interests of the Redeemer, because of any recorded want of success in the case of those who have gone before us. Let us be chiefly concerned about our individual and collective faithfulness to our Divine Master. His assurance is—"Be thou *faithful* unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The future and eternal reward of the witnesses for Christ will not be in proportion to the amount of apparent success with which their exertions is crowned, but will correspond with the spirit and the motive which prompt to labour and suffering in His cause. Witness-bearing for Christ is *the* business of Christ's people—the time for the full manifestation of success in this work rests with him alone. The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a *witness* unto all nations : and *then* shall the end come. Let every one of us, *first* giving *himself* unto the Lord, and labouring with zeal and wisdom in the situation which the Divine Householder has assigned, continue to swell the number of Christ's *witnesses* on the earth ; and beware, lest, being led away with the error of the wicked, he fall from his stedfastness. Meanwhile, let us recognize, in the events that are sifting nations and churches at the present day, the gracious designs of God to say to such as have even a little strength, and have kept His word, and not denied His name—" Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." For thus saith the Lord of hosts, " yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land ; and I will shake all nations, and the Desire of all nations shall come : and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts."

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